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ABSTRACT

This study examined ethnic community perceptions of the Austin Independent School District (AISD). It investigated citizens' assessments of the quality of public education, ethnic tensions in the schools, and the equality of resource distribution among the schools. It also examined variations in perceptions of the AISD by ethnic group. Data collection involved surveys and community interviews with white, Hispanic American, African American, Asian American, and other community members. Results indicated that public opinion about the AISD was mixed. One significant negative perception, which had greater consensus than any other topic explored, was that minority schools did not receive equal resources or treatment. Most citizens rated educational quality as poor or fair. Respondents with children attending AISD schools rated the quality of education higher than did people who did not have children in AISD schools. Children from lower socioeconomic status and minority group families were more likely to attend schools in AISD than children from higher socioeconomic status and white families. There was widespread perception that racial tensions existed among various ethnic groups in Austin schools. African Americans were the most alienated from AISD and the most critical of educational quality and distribution of resources. An appendix lists policy research project interviewees. (SM)

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# Ethnic Community Views of the Austin Independent School District

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Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
Policy Research Project Report
Number 140

# Ethnic Community Views of the Austin Independent School District

Project directed by

Richard L. Schott

A report by the
Policy Research Project on
Ethnic and Race Relations in Austin, Texas
2001

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# Foreword

The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs has established interdisciplinary research on policy problems as the core of its educational program. A major part of this program is the nine-month policy research project, in the course of which two or more faculty members from different disciplines direct the research of ten to thirty graduate students of diverse backgrounds on a policy issue of concern to a government or nonprofit agency. This "client orientation" brings the students face to face with administrators, legislators, and other officials active in the policy process and demonstrates that research in a policy environment demands special talents. It also illuminates the occasional difficulties of relating research findings to the world of political realities.

This report presents the findings of a study of ethnic community perceptions of the Austin Independent School District conducted by faculty and students in the LBJ School of Public Affairs during 1999-2000. The project, funded by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, the LBJ School, and the City of Austin, examined citizens' assessments of the quality of public education, ethnic tensions in the schools, and the equality of resource distribution among these schools. Based on survey research and community interviews, the project also studied the variation in the perceptions of AISD among different ethnic communities.

The curriculum of the LBJ School is intended not only to develop effective public servants but also to produce research that will enlighten and inform those already engaged in the policy process. The project that resulted in this report has helped to accomplish the first task; it is our hope that the report itself will contribute to the second. Finally, it should be noted that neither the LBJ School nor The University of Texas at Austin necessarily endorses the views or findings of this report.

Edwin Dorn
Dean

# Executive Summary

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Faculty and students at the Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) School of Public Affairs prepared this report on community perceptions of the Austin Independent School District. Funding came from the LBJ School, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, and the City of Austin. The study is based on a scientific random sample survey of Austin residents and interviews with community leaders.

The current Austin population comprises Whites (54 percent), Hispanics (28 percent), African Americans (13 percent), Asians (4 percent), and other (1 percent), with these proportions shifting toward majority-minority status by 2008. In addition to the survey, interviews were held with some 60 community leaders and activists, most of them from minority ethnic groups.

## Chapter 2. The Austin Independent School District: Background

The Austin Public Schools, the city's first school district, was established as a department of the City of Austin in 1881. In 1954, with the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision holding that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional and providing that all schools be integrated, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) was created as a separate entity to replace the Austin Public Schools.

Austin schools, like most others, had been racially segregated for most of the 20th century; and after the *Brown* decision the district adopted a series of desegregation plans. The first was freedom of choice, under which students were free to choose a campus different from the one they had been attending. Under pressure from the Department of Justice and the federal courts, AISD adopted mandatory one-way busing in 1971. After much litigation, two-way busing was begun in 1979 and lasted until 1986, when the district was released from court supervision.

After the district was released from court oversight, Austin schools, like most urban schools in the country, resegregated. Elementary schools returned to a neighborhood school policy in the early 1990s, followed by high schools and finally by middle schools. In 1998, the school board voted to end busing save when requested by students who wished to continue at a school to which they had earlier been assigned. The district returned to neighborhood schools for all grade levels starting in the 2000-01 school year.

## Chapter 3. Survey Findings

A scientific survey conducted by the Survey Research Center of The University of Texas at Austin was designed to include a statistically sufficient number of persons from various ethnic and racial groups to allow for valid comparisons among these groups.

The sample size of the survey was 631, sufficient to provide an accurate picture of residents of the city of Austin. The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percent.

Over the past six years, the proportion of both Hispanic teachers and students in AISD has grown and the proportion of African American and White teachers and students has declined. Non-Whites form the majority of the student population in the elementary grades.

Of those respondents who voiced an opinion, the majority (56 percent) rated the quality of education offered in AISD as poor or fair. Parents with children attending Austin schools rated the quality of education higher than respondents who do not have children attending Austin schools. Blacks gave the lowest marks, followed by Whites, Hispanics, and Asians in that order.

A majority of those surveyed felt that ethnic and racial tension in general was a problem in AISD schools. This belief held for both AISD parents and respondents with no children in public school. Blacks were most likely to feel that there was ethnic tension between students and teachers (49.5 percent) followed by Hispanics, Whites, and Asians in that order. Only a small percentage of AISD parents (15 percent) reported that their children had experienced discrimination by teachers or school officials.

The majority of respondents reported that, in their view, there was inequality of resources available to predominantly minority schools as compared to White schools. Of those with an opinion, Blacks, at 85 percent, were mostly likely to believe that minority schools had fewer resources. They were followed by Whites (77 percent), Hispanics (71 percent), and Asians (67 percent). Of the various topics we studied, resource inequity was clearly the most salient.

## Chapter 4. Community Leaders' Perceptions of the Austin Independent School District

There was divergence in the views held by the community leaders and activists we interviewed. On some topics, however, there appeared to be consensus. Most approved, with some reservations, of the return to neighborhood schools.

Though some referred to the improvements the district has been making in recent years, many shared continuing concerns regarding the quality of minority education in general and the competence of teachers. They were troubled by the fact that minority scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, with the exception of Asians, continue to lag the scores of Whites and Asians. Several of those interviewed questioned whether the curriculum and the teaching staff were sufficiently sensitized to the various minority cultures in Austin. Others expressed concern at the low salaries offered teachers.

Although most who commented on the issue suggested that the relationship between students and teachers has gotten better over the years, there was a sense that racial tension

exists between teachers and minority students. Some leaders observed that some teachers might have lower academic expectations for the students.

There was a strong feeling among nearly all who commented that school resources are inequitable. They noted that facilities were often less modern in minority schools and questioned whether students there were offered the same quality of education available at nonminority schools in the district.

## Chapter 5. Conclusions

Pubic opinion about AISD, as measured by our survey research and reflected in our community interviews, is mixed. The most striking negative perception is that minority schools do not receive equal resources or treatment. There was greater consensus on this topic than any other we explored.

Citizens' ratings of the quality of education provided by AISD give pause. Of those who had an opinion, the majority of Austinites rated educational quality as only poor or fair. African Americans were most likely to rate the quality of education as poor or fair, followed by Whites and Hispanics. However, respondents with children attending AISD schools rated the quality of education higher than those who did not have children attending AISD schools.

There is evidence that children from families of lower socioeconomic background are much more likely to attend schools in AISD than those from higher economic strata. Minority groups, except for Asians, are more likely than Whites to have children in Austin schools and are thus dependent for their education largely on AISD and its resources.

There is a widespread perception that racial tensions exist among various ethnic groups in Austin schools. Nearly twice as many respondents held the view that such tension exists compared to those who did not. Respondents were evenly split on whether racial tensions exist between teachers and students. However, there was relatively little support for the suggestion that teachers intentionally discriminate against minority students.

Of the various ethnic groups we studied, Blacks appear to be the most alienated from AISD. They are almost without exception the most critical of the quality of education and the distribution of school resources. At the same time, Blacks are declining as a proportion of the school population, bringing a perception that they are isolated and their voices not heard.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a student-faculty research team from the Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) School of Public Affairs that investigated citizens' perceptions of the Austin Independent School District (AISD) from 1999 to 2000. The LBJ School, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, and the City of Austin supported the research. The following pages, however, reflect solely the research findings; the funders were not involved in the design of the project or in its findings and conclusions.

We were drawn to this topic from a concern with racial and ethnic relations and an interest in how they play out in Austin. After a flurry of activity during the civil rights decade of the 1960s, public attention to the issue has diminished substantially—especially after the dismantling of court-ordered school integration beginning in the 1980s. The pendulum now appears to be swinging back to a renewed interest in minority rights, minority education, and attention to the economic and social plight of much of the minority population in the United States. This interest is especially salient in view of the fact that Texas, as well as some other states, will have a majority-minority population as early as 2008. The current population of Austin, now comprising Whites (54 percent), Hispanics (28 percent), African Americans (13 percent), Asians (4 percent), and other (1 percent), may shift to majority-minority status slightly earlier.[1]

This report is divided into five chapters including this introduction. Chapter 2 briefly reviews the recent history of ethnic relations in AISD. It tracks the process of desegregation that the school district began in 1955 and describes the evolution of district integration policies and programs from the 1950s through the mid-1980s, when the district was declared unitary and court supervision was removed. It also discusses the gradual return to neighborhood schools by the year 2000.

Chapter 3 presents the data from a scientific survey of citizens' perceptions of AISD, including views of the overall quality of education offered, possible racial tensions between students and among students and teachers, ethnic discrimination, and resource distribution across district schools. Chapter 4 presents comments and themes from interviews with Austin community leaders and activists concerning their views on the subject. Finally, Chapter 5 briefly summarizes the findings and offers some concluding observations.

## Notes

[1] Survey Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, O'Neil Provost, personal communication, July 27, 2000.

# Chapter 2. The Austin Independent School District: Background

## Introduction

The Austin Public Schools, the city's first school district, was established as a department of the City of Austin in 1881.[1] As the case with most southern states, the Texas Constitution outlawed the integration of Blacks and Whites and required separate schools for them.[2] This dual school system was considered separate but equal, a doctrine upheld by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896.

In 1926, the Texas State Department of Education reported that Black schools, most of them located in East Austin, were overcrowded and lacked necessary supplies and equipment. In many cases, the department found, schools were situated in buildings so in need of repair that they were unsuitable for education.[3] White schools received disproportionately more money than Black schools received. Specifically, schools attended by White children were funded at $183.49 per child, Black schools at $84.07 per child, and schools attended by Hispanics at $65.31 per child.[4] (One African American woman we interviewed recalled this resource disparity among schools. "When I was in school, we got books from White schools, from last year. They got the new books; we got the old ones, some of them with pages torn out of them.")[5]

## School Integration via "Freedom of Choice"

In 1954, with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision holding that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional and providing that all schools be integrated, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) was created as a separate entity to replace the Austin Public Schools.[6] Texas, like most southern states, resisted integration. In 1955, Texas Governor Allan Shivers warned Texas school districts that they might risk the loss of school funding for integrating too quickly. In an opinion that same year, Texas Attorney General John Ben Shepperd ruled that "the state laws of Texas still call for segregated schools. . . . [U]ntil the Supreme Court specifically states otherwise, segregation remains the law in Texas."[7]

The AISD began slowly integrating in 1955, when the Board of Trustees adopted a policy of integration through choice of the individual student. This policy provided that Black students were allowed to enroll in schools that they had previously been prohibited from attending. However, they could decide, as most did, to remain at the schools they were currently attending. The district pursued this "freedom of choice" policy, with minor modifications, through the year 1970.

Due to the adoption of "freedom of choice," integration proceeded slowly. AISD began integration with high schools, then junior high and middle schools, and then elementary schools, which remained segregated until 1961.[8] In the school year 1961-62, 90 percent of Black children still attended elementary schools that had at least 99 percent Black enrollment.[9] Schools that had previously been "Black" schools, such as Anderson High School, remained predominantly African American. Further, although the district integrated elementary schools in East Austin by

changing attendance boundaries so that "White" and Black students would attend the same schools, most of the "White" students were in fact Hispanic. Thus, while African American students increasingly chose to attend integrated schools, most enrolled in schools with a large Hispanic population.[10] As of 1970, only 7 percent of students in East Austin schools were White.[11]

In 1968, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) studied those southern school districts, like Austin, that had relied on freedom of choice plans and found the pace of integration to be too slow. Based largely on HEW's report, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968) that freedom of choice plans did not provide for sufficient or timely integration. The ruling required school districts to formulate plans that forced integration through busing and eliminated the continuing de facto dual school system for Blacks and Whites. AISD then negotiated a new desegregation plan with HEW between 1968 and 1970. However, these efforts were insufficient, and in 1970, HEW ruled that AISD's desegregation policy violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964.[12]

The 1970 finding added impetus to the suit originally filed by the U.S. Department of Justice in 1968 alleging that AISD was intentionally segregating students in its public schools.[13] At the time the suit was filed, 90 percent of the schools in the district had either predominantly (more than 75 percent) White or minority student populations.[14] In the suit, AISD was required to justify why it (1) had continued with integration via freedom of choice despite the Supreme Courts' decision that choice plans were insufficient, (2) had constructed new schools in locations with a majority of Hispanic students, and (3) had integrated Black and Hispanic students but not Black and White students. In the ensuing trial, AISD admitted to segregating African American students but alleged that state law had required this segregation.[15]

## Mandatory Busing

Ordered to submit a new plan for desegregation in 1970, the AISD board heard endorsements for two-way busing from Black and Hispanic organizations. In August 1970, Federal District Judge Jack Roberts ordered the integration of all grade levels, as well as the formulation of a plan to address the needs of Mexican American students. AISD decided to bus students in East Austin to schools in the western parts of the city; Black students were bused to White schools, but White students were not bused to Black schools. In the fall of 1970, the board closed Anderson High School, the traditionally all-Black high school, and began busing Black students to Reagan, McCallum, and Johnston High Schools.[16]

When the school year began in 1971, Black citizens protested the closure of Anderson. They expressed strong dissatisfaction with the one-way busing policy, which, they argued, placed the entire burden of integration on students of color.[17] One African American leader pointed out that one-way busing was a heavy burden on parents, forcing them to travel farther to pick up their children if they became ill during school hours and thus jeopardizing the parents' relationships with their employers.[18]

Other forms of protest against the one-way busing policy emerged. Community activist Velma Roberts started an alternative school with volunteer teachers in East Austin. According to

Roberts, the intention was to draw African American students from AISD, causing the district to lose some of its per capita funding. It was hoped that this action would force the district to reconsider the busing policy. However, Roberts' school itself closed for lack of funds.[19]

In 1973, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Judge Jack Roberts' approval of integration through the one-way busing of African American students, holding that no one ethnic group should bear the burden of busing.[20] The Supreme Court, however, in 1976 reversed the Fifth Circuit ruling and remanded the case back to that court. In November 1977, the Fifth Circuit found that AISD had intentionally segregated Mexican American students because of the district's emphasis on neighborhood schools.

Though AISD filed a petition for a writ of certiorari with the U.S. Supreme Court, the Court refused the petition and affirmed the Fifth Circuit Court's ruling that AISD had intentionally segregated minorities. In 1979, the district court held that the school district had violated the Constitution and ordered AISD immediately to implement a desegregation plan covering Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. The court also appointed a 21-member tri-ethnic panel to assist in developing this plan. After much effort, all parties finally agreed to a consent decree, which provided for busing of students both ways and which was widely supported by the public.[21]

After implementation of the plan developed by the panel, Austin schools became largely integrated. By 1980, only 20 percent of Austin schools were considered either predominantly White or predominately minority.[22] In an effort to prevent White families from placing their children in private schools rather than attending integrated schools, fifteen Catholic priests froze enrollment in Catholic private schools.[23] Even with two-way busing, East Austin students were bused three times more frequently than those living in West Austin.[24]

## End of Court Oversight

In 1983, AISD took the position that the schools were now fully integrated and asked the district court to hold that the district had reached "unitary" (i.e., integrated) status, a ruling that would release AISD from further court oversight. The district court ended its jurisdiction in 1986 (Austin being one of the first southern districts to be declared unitary) but required that AISD not alter its method for assigning students to schools or engage in discriminatory practices.

Shortly after the district court released AISD from supervision, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that a school district could constitutionally revise its desegregation plan after court supervision ceased. In 1987, the Board of Trustees approved a change in its integration plan that eliminated busing for elementary schools, thus returning to neighborhood schools for students in that age group. Because the change resulted in a sharp decline in the enrollment of White students in East Austin elementary schools, the district designated those schools as "Priority Schools" and allocated extra resources to them. Although parties to the desegregation suit requested the case be reopened because of this change, the district court dismissed the request, noting that it no longer had jurisdiction.[25]

After the district was released from court oversight, Austin schools, like most urban schools in the country, resegregated. Between 1987 and 1997, the percentage of Austin schools with a

predominantly minority enrollment (defined as at least 70 percent minority students) increased from 26 percent to 48 percent. Part of this change was occasioned by the increase in the number of neighborhood schools, part was due to the highly segregated housing patterns that characterize Austin, and part was likely due to the tendency of new arrivals to settle in areas with neighborhood schools of their ethnicity.

Elementary schools returned to the neighborhood school concept in the early 1990s, followed by high schools and finally by middle schools. In 1998, the school board voted to end busing save when requested by students who wished to continue at a school to which they had earlier been assigned. The district returned to neighborhood schools for all grade levels starting in the 2000-01 school year.

In the school year 2000-01, AISD student data indicated that campus ethnic makeup closely paralleled that of the surrounding neighborhood. At the elementary school level, fully 92 percent of campuses had a majority of students of one ethnicity, and 63 percent were campuses in which one ethnic group accounted for two-thirds or more of the students. In the middle schools, 82 percent of campuses had one ethnic group in the majority. At the high school level, 64 percent of campuses had a majority formed by one ethnic group.[26]

## Notes

[1] James Benjamin Chote, "Desegregation of the Austin Independent School District: A Question of Balance" (Master's Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1991), p. 1.

[2] Rose Collete Knisely, "The Influence of Federal, State, and Local Policies on School Desegregation in the Austin, Texas Independent School District" (Master's Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1978), p. 140.

[3] J. J. McDonald, "Race Relations in Austin, Texas, c. 1917-1929" (Master's Thesis, University of Southampton, July 1993), p.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Interview by Kyla Hobbs with Velma Roberts, Vice President, Black Citizens' Task Force, Austin, Texas, November 5, 1999.

[6] Chote, "Desegregation," p. 1.

[7] Carolyn Jones, *Volma: My Journey. One Man's Impact on the Civil Rights Movement in Austin, Texas* (Austin, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1998), p. 163.

[8] Ibid., pp. 5-8.

[9] David C. Humphrey, *Austin: An Illustrated History* (Northridge, California: Windsor Publications Inc., 1985), p. 218.

[10] Chote, "Desegregation," pp. 5-8.

[11] Jones, *Volma: My Journey* , pp. 54-55.

[12] Chote, "Desegregation," pp. 9-10.

[13] Jodi Berls, Jeff South, and Samar Abulhassan, "Schools Face Revival of Segregation: Segregation Increasing at Schools: Austin Diversity Losing Ground Because of Housing Patterns, Boundary Changes," *Austin American-Statesman* (June 29, 1997). Online. Available : http://archives.statesman.com/. Accessed: April 3, 1998.

[14] James E. Garcia, "Students' Opinions Mixed: Integrations Great, They say; Busing Isn't." *Austin American-Statesman* (September 2, 1990). Online. Available http://archives.statesman.com/ Accessed: April 3, 1998.

[15] Chote, "Desegregation," pp. 10-11.

[16] Knisely, "The Influence of Federal, State and Local Policies," pp. 81-90.

[17] Jones, *Volma: My Journey*, pp. 125-27.

[18] Interview by Kyla Hobbs with Dorothy Turner, President, Black Citizen's Task Force, Austin, Texas, November 2, 1999.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Jones, *Volma: My Journey*, p. 158.

[21] William Bingham, AISD Attorney, personal communication with Richard Schott, Austin, Texas, August 10, 2001.

[22] Garcia, "Student's Opinions Mixed."

[23] Jones, *Volma: My Journey*, p. 199.

[24] Andy Alford, "Austin School Busing to End, Austin Will End 27 Years on Busing: Trustees Decide to Keep Students in Schools Near Home." *Austin American-Statesman* (December 16, 1998). Online. Available: http://archives.statesman.com/. Accessed March 4, 1999.

[25] Chote, "Desegregation," pp. 85-89.

[26] Data provided by the Office of Student Records, AISD, August 14, 2001.

# Chapter 3. Survey Findings

## Research Design

Attitudes and opinions regarding race relations held by the Austin public were captured by a random sample survey of residents inside the city limits of Austin. (A random sample means that the respondents are chosen in such a way as to ensure that their answers, within certain limits, reflect those of the overall population.) This survey, carried out by the Survey Research Center of The University of Texas at Austin, was designed to include a statistically sufficient number of persons from various ethnic and racial groups to allow for valid comparisons among these groups.

The sample size of the survey was 631, sufficient to provide an accurate picture of residents of the city of Austin. The margin of error of the poll was plus or minus 4 percent, meaning that the percentage given in a table may actually vary as much as four-tenths from the number stated. However, this margin of error is the outermost possibility, and variations of 1 to 2 percent are much more probable. Given these limitations, the sample accurately reflects the opinions of Austinites in general.

## Background and Sample Characteristics

### The Austin Independent School District

With expenditures of roughly $579 million in the 1999-2000 academic year and a staff of 9,558, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) is one of the largest employers in the metropolitan Austin area.[1] AISD has expanded its facilities and resources to meet the needs of a growing student population and currently has 103 schools, including 71 elementary schools, 17 middle schools, 11 high schools, and 4 special campuses.[2]

*Teacher Demographics*

Of the 9,558 staff members AISD employed during the 1999-2000 academic year, approximately 5,100 were teachers.[3] Thirty percent of AISD teachers were members of ethnic minority groups, a percentage that is somewhat higher than teachers in the state as a whole. Table 3.1 compares the proportions of teachers of various ethnicities with the statewide averages; AISD had a higher percentage of Hispanic teachers and a lower percentage of White teachers than did the state as a whole.

## Table 3.1
## Ethnic Proportions of Teaching Staff in AISD and Texas, 1999-2000

| Race/Ethnicity | Austin (%) | Texas (%) |
|---|---|---|
| White | 70.0 | 73.9 |
| African American | 7.9 | 8.6 |
| Hispanic | 20.8 | 16.6 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 1.1 | 0.6 |
| Native American | 0.2 | 0.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports for the 1998-99 school year, Austin, Texas.

The ethnic distribution of teachers in AISD has also changed. Table 3.2 illustrates the shift in ethnic representation over a five-year period.

## Table 3.2
## Ethnicity of AISD Teachers, 1994-95 and 1999-2000

| Ethnicity | 1994-95 (N=4,765) | 1999-2000 (N=5,100) | Change in Percentage Points |
|---|---|---|---|
| African American | 9.6% | 7.7% | -1.7 |
| Hispanic | 18.7% | 20.8% | 2.1 |
| White | 71.0% | 70.0% | -1.0 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 0.70% | 1.1% | 0.4 |
| Native American | 0.0% | 0.2% | 0.2 |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports for the 1994-95 and 1999-2000 school years, Austin, Texas.

Over this period, one sees the largest increase among Hispanics (2.1 percentage points) and the largest decrease in African Americans (1.7), followed by Whites (1.0).

In the 1988-89 school year, AISD employed 4,025 teachers; a decade later that number had grown to 4,851. The increase of teachers (21 percent) was somewhat lower than the increase in students (26 percent). As a result, the student-teacher ratio increased from 15.6 to 16.4 students per teacher during the same period. The district's 1999-2000 student-teacher ratio was higher than the average for Texas, 15.2, but slightly lower than the national student-teacher ratio of 17.2.[4]

*Student Demographics*

In the school year 1997-98, AISD first became a majority-minority district in all grades, pre-K through 12.[5] As of the school year 1999-2000, Hispanic students accounted for 51 percent of students in first grade, Whites accounted for 31 percent, African Americans accounted for 15 percent, and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 3 percent.[6] In the future, AISD will gradually become a Hispanic-majority district at all grade levels.

**Table 3.3**
**Ethnicity of AISD Students, 1994-95 and 1999-2000**

| Ethnicity | 1994-95 (N=73,191) | 1999-2000 (N=77,723) | Change in Percentage Points |
|---|---|---|---|
| African American | 18.5% | 16.7% | -1.8 |
| Hispanic | 39.1% | 45.8% | 6.7 |
| White | 39.8% | 34.8% | -5.0 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 2.3% | 2.5% | 0.2 |
| Native American | 0.3% | 0.3% | - |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports for the 1994-95 and 1999-2000 school years, Austin, Texas.

As table 3.3 reveals, the largest changes appeared among Hispanics and Whites. Hispanics showed the largest increase, while Whites showed the largest decline. The drop in the relative number of African American students likely reflects the relative decrease in the African American population in Austin over this period.

**Characteristics of the Survey Participants**

Twenty three percent of our sample members reported having children in an AISD school, 6 percent had children in private school in Austin, and the remaining 71 percent did not have children in school at the time of the survey. Of the various ethnic groups we studied, African

Americans, at 44 percent, had the largest percentage of children in AISD, followed by Hispanics (36 percent), Whites (14 percent), and Asians (12 percent).

Table 3.4 indicates that there is a significant trend for more highly educated parents to report fewer children attending AISD schools. It is likely that this correlation also holds for income, as it is generally accepted that the mother's educational level is highly indicative of household income. This relationship is likely also influenced by the fact that it takes longer to obtain a graduate degree, which leads to a higher paying job, and that higher socioeconomic families tend to have fewer children.

**Table 3.4**
**Public School Attendance and Mother's Level of Education**

| Mother's Education | Child in Public School (%) |
|---|---|
| Some High School or Less | 30 |
| High School Graduate | 22 |
| Some College or College Graduate | 21 |
| Graduate Study or Degree | 7 |

## Citizens' Perceptions of the Austin Independent School District

Drawing from the sample survey, the following section summarizes the attitudes and perceptions of the AISD held by the sample members. The issues we explored include the overall quality of public education in Austin, ethnic tension among students, relationships between teachers and students, and the distribution of resources among district schools.

### Quality of Public Education

Members of the sample were asked to rate the overall quality of public education in Austin. Their responses are summarized in Table 3.5.

## Table 3.5
## Responses to the Question "How would you rate the quality of public education provided by the Austin Independent School District?" (N=631)

| | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Poor | 95 | 15.1 |
| Fair | 174 | 27.6 |
| Good | 180 | 28.5 |
| Excellent | 31 | 4.9 |
| Don't Know | 151 | 23.9 |
| Total | 631 | 100.0 |

Because nearly a quarter of the respondents expressed no opinion on this question, we also calculated the percentages taking into account only those persons who did reply with an opinion. These percentages are illustrated in Table 3.6.

## Table 3.6
## Responses to the Question "How would you rate the quality of public education provided by the Austin Independent School District?" (N=480)

| | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Poor | 95 | 19.8 |
| Fair | 174 | 36.3 |
| Good | 180 | 37.5 |
| Excellent | 31 | 6.4 |
| Total | 480 | 100.0 |

In sum, of the respondents who *had* an opinion, approximately 56 percent rated the quality of public education in Austin as poor to fair.

Additional analysis indicates that there are underlying patterns to the above answers. Specifically, variation in answers depends on whether the respondent had a child in AISD schools. This pattern is indicated in Table 3.7.

## Table 3.7
## Responses to the Question "How would you rate the quality of public education provided by the Austin Independent School District?" (N=480)

| Child in Public School | Poor (%) | Fair (%) | Good (%) | Excellent (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No | 20.3 | 38.5 | 35.9 | 5.3 | 100.0 |
| Yes | 18.6 | 30.7 | 41.4 | 9.3 | 100.0 |
| Average | 19.8 | 36.3 | 37.5 | 6.5 | 100.0 |

$p < 0.08$.

Table 3.7 suggests that, overall, individuals with children in school had a *better* impression of the quality of education in AISD than those who did not have children in school. Fifty-one percent of AISD parents rated the quality of education as good to excellent, compared to 42 percent of respondents who did not have children in the Austin public schools. This pattern held for all ethnic groups except Blacks, where respondents with children in public school gave a slightly less-favorable rating than those who did not.

Impressions of school quality also varied among the ethnic groups we studied. Asians gave the district the highest rating, followed by Hispanics and then by Whites and Blacks. Overall, with the exception of Asians, the majority of the ethnic groups rated the quality of education as fair to poor.

## Table 3.8
## Responses to the Question "How would you rate the quality of public education provided by the Austin Independent School District?" (N=469)

| Race/Ethnicity | Poor (%) | Fair (%) | Good (%) | Excellent (%) | Total* (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 23 | 36 | 37 | 3 | 99 |
| Hispanic | 9 | 43 | 38 | 10 | 100 |
| African American | 25 | 35 | 33 | 7 | 100 |
| Asian | 10 | 31 | 48 | 12 | 101 |
| Average | 20 | 36 | 38 | 6 | 100 |

$p < 0.005$.
*Total percentages may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

**Racial and Ethnic Tension among Students**

We were also interested in the public's perception on whether there existed tension among students in AISD.

## Table 3.9
## Responses to the Question "Is racial or ethnic tension among students a problem in the Austin public schools?" (N=631)

| | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 135 | 21.4 |
| Yes | 265 | 42.0 |
| Don't Know | 231 | 36.6 |
| Total | 631 | 100.0 |

Most of those with no opinion were respondents who do not have children in the school district. Among the remainder, a "yes" response was given by a margin of two to one. The results shown in Table 3.9 are somewhat misleading because of the large number of respondents who had no opinion. Taking into account only those with an opinion on this issue, we find that parents with children in AISD are *less* likely to perceive tension than those who do not. Still, those replying in the affirmative constitute more than half of those with children in the district.

## Table 3.10
## Responses to the Question "Is racial or ethnic tension among students a problem in the Austin public schools?" by Child in Public School (N=400)

| Child in Public School | Racial Tension a Problem in Austin | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | No (%) | Yes (%) | Total (%) |
| No | 30.0 | 70.0 | 100 |
| Yes | 41.4 | 58.6 | 100 |
| Total | 33.8 | 66.2 | 100 |

$p<0.02$.

**Racial and Ethnic Tension between Teachers and Students**

We were also interested in citizens' views on whether there were ethnic tensions between teachers and students in Austin schools. As Table 3.11 suggests, those who had an opinion were about evenly divided.

## Table 3.11
## Responses to the Question, "Is racial or ethnic tension between students and teachers a problem in the Austin public schools?" (N=631)

| | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 183 | 29.0 |
| Yes | 179 | 28.4 |
| Don't Know | 269 | 42.6 |
| Total | 631 | 100.0 |

We also explored the possibility that certain ethnic groups might respond differently to this question and found definite and significant patterns of response. These appear in Table 2.12.

## Table 3.12
## Responses to the Question "Is racial or ethnic tension between students and teachers a problem in the Austin public schools?" (N=618)

| Race/Ethnicity | No (%) | Yes (%) | Don't Know (%) | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 23.8 | 25.4 | 50.8 | 100.0 |
| Hispanic | 38.7 | 32.1 | 29.2 | 100.0 |
| Black | 30.1 | 49.5 | 20.4 | 100.0 |
| Asian | 32.4 | 10.9 | 56.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 28.8 | 28.2 | 43.0 | 100.0 |

$p<0.000$.

The data indicate that half of the Blacks surveyed believed that there were racial tensions between students and teachers, whereas 30 percent answered in the negative. A "yes" answer

was also given by Whites more frequently than not. On the other hand, more Hispanics and Asians responded in the negative than the affirmative.

A related question, however, produced a rather different set of answers. We asked participants who had children in AISD whether they had reported differential treatment by teachers or staff.

**Table 3.13**
**Responses to the Question "Has your child ever reported being treated unfairly by AISD school officials or teachers because of his or her ethnicity?"**
**(N=143)**

| | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 119 | 83 |
| Yes | 21 | 15 |
| Don't Know | 3 | 2 |
| Total | 143 | 100 |

The overwhelming majority of Austin parents who have children in the AISD system, nearly 84 percent, asserted that their children had never reported being treated unfairly by AISD officials or teachers because of race or ethnicity. Further analysis by ethnic group failed to reach the required level of significance.

**Resource Distribution**

A final issue of concern was resource allocation among schools in AISD. A substantial number of Austinites who were surveyed believe that there is a discrepancy in resources between predominantly minority schools and predominantly White schools.

## Table 3.14
## Responses to the Question "Do predominantly minority public schools receive the same resources as predominantly White public schools in Austin?" (N=630)

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| No | 326 | 51.7 |
| Yes | 97 | 15.4 |
| Don't Know | 207 | 32.8 |
| *Total | 630 | 99.9 |

*Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

Of those survey participants who had an opinion, more than two-thirds (67 percent) believed that predominately minority public schools do not receive the same resources. The responses vary among ethnic groups. As Table 3.15 below indicates, of those who had an opinion, African Americans had the highest percentage of respondents who said that minority schools receive fewer resources than White schools, followed by Whites, Hispanics, and Asians in that order.

## Table 3.15
## Responses to the Question "Do predominantly minority public schools receive the same resources as predominantly White public schools in Austin?" (N=415)

| Race/Ethnicity | Minority Schools Get Same Resources | | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|
| | No (%) | Yes (%) | |
| White | 76.8 | 23.2 | 100 |
| Hispanic | 70.9 | 29.1 | 100 |
| Black | 88.5 | 11.5 | 100 |
| Asian | 67.3 | 32.7 | 100 |
| Total | 76.9 | 23.1 | 100 |

$p<0.01$.

# Notes

[1] Texas Education Agency (TEA), Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) District Profiles for AISD (1999-2000).

[2] Ibid.

[3] TEA, "Snapshot," 1999-2000. Online. Available: http://www.tea.tx.us/perfreport/snapshot/. Accessed: April 25, 2001.

[4] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Statistics of Public Elementary and Secondary Day Schools; Common Core of Data Surveys; and Projections of Education Statistics to 2008," compiled by Thomas D. Snyder, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1998* (May 1999), Table 65.

[5] TEA, "Standard Reports 1997-98." Online. Available: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/adhocrpt/. Accessed April 24, 2001.

[6] TEA, PEIMS, "Student Enrollment Reports, 2000-01." Online. Available: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/adhocrpt/. Accessed 27 April,2001.

# Chapter 4. Community Leaders' Perceptions of the Austin Independent School District

In order to explore further perceptions of and attitudes toward the Austin Independent School District (AISD), we conducted a series of interviews with community leaders, most of them members of ethnic minority groups. These individuals include members of ethnic interest groups, grass roots organizers, the clergy, and government and AISD officials, among others. The interviews covered a variety of issues related to AISD. This chapter discusses their insights and perceptions in several areas: neighborhood schools, the general quality of AISD, perceptions of ethnic tensions among students, teacher-student relations, ethnic discrimination by teachers, and, finally, the equity of school resources.

## Neighborhood Schools

Many of those with whom we spoke appeared to welcome the end of forced integration and a return to a policy of neighborhood schools. One benefit, especially at elementary and middle schools, was the proximity of their children's school, which allowed parents better to monitor their children and participate in school activities.

A Black pastor commented, "In my eyes there was no need to integrate the schools because the real racism was in real estate, where you lived." [1] A leader in the Native American community observed, "Now we are going to focus on educating the children in their neighborhoods. . . . [That] sounds wonderful, but to me, it's sad that it's much like we decided to go back to 1965 and have Whites on one side and Blacks and Browns on the other."[2]

Some leaders were concerned with the influence neighborhood schools would have on school-funding patterns. They feared that the largely Black and Hispanic schools in East Austin would have less political support now that fewer White students were attending them. According to one activist, "If you're going to have segregation, then there ought to be powers that go along with that. Nothing they [AISD] do here in East Austin will ever satisfy me as long as we don't have control over our own schools."[3]

Some participants believed that the return to neighborhood schools provided for separate but unequal education for minority students. A former head of the Austin NAACP observed, "The problem with the AISD is basically stated: you cannot get the same type of education in different parts of the city. In some parts, schools do an extremely good job. In other parts of the city, teachers baby-sit, and that can be largely analyzed by looking at the socioeconomic background of kids that go to those schools."[4]

One high school official worried that resegregation would again concentrate schools by ethnicity. "We're going back to the 1970s. . . . [M]ost of the minorities, the low socioeconomic students, will be in one specific school . . . and most of your schools that are Anglo are going to be predominantly Anglo."[5]

## Perceptions of AISD Quality

Some interviewees felt that AISD has made significant strides in improving education and facilities over the years. Others shared concerns regarding the quality of minority education and the competence of teachers. Several participants pointed out that a strong educational system is essential to Austin's overall growth and development. As a member of the Urban League stated, "The Chamber of Commerce, who goes out to market companies and corporations that come to Austin, the first question they ask for is 'How's the school system?' If they feel that the school system is not adequate for their employees, they are going to go elsewhere. So it is very critical that we do have a modernized educational system."[6]

Some African American community leaders were of the opinion that resources in predominantly Black schools are inadequate. "They [AISD] haven't addressed our needs. . . . Anything that happens for our kids, it's because it's a good teacher and they want to do the right thing. Other than that, our kids are pretty much on their own."[7] Another Black leader suggested that improved teacher training, a better skill enhancement program, and extra benefits for teachers and principals in minority schools could help enhance minority education.[8]

A Hispanic activist commented: "I think AISD has really done a miserable job. . . . We can see how the school district lags very far behind in making a priority for our kids to be able to pass the TAAS, pass high school, or even go to college. They are not getting college prep. . . . And now the city is going to resegregation. . . . They are putting all our kids in low-performing schools."[9]

One AISD official observed, "The issues [facing the district], I think, are the miseducation of children. Even though we are making progress, there is still a lot more progress we can make in providing equity in educating children of color and children who speak a language other than English. We still have a lot to do there."[10]

Another senior AISD official suggested that although there was definitely room for improvement, especially in the education of lower income and minority students, Austin schools have been gradually improving.

> I've been proud to be a part of the AISD because we continue to try to be inclusive. We try to have a good program, and we try to have our youngsters have experiences with other ethnic groups and we want that, of course, to continue because we know if you look at the broad spectrum of education, how important it is, that everybody will have an opportunity to reach that potential and to be a viable kind of citizen in the community in which we live. And, this diversity is a marvelous resource. I think we're on our way. I've seen a lot of changes in Austin.[11]

A Black school board member felt that the district still has a long way to go, stating, "In my mind, it is unacceptable for any school to be rated as low-performing. Any of them. No matter where they're located. That just means we have failed as a district."[12]

This divergence in views we found a rather common theme in minority leaders' assessment of AISD. Members of the older generation, having seen substantial progress in education over the

decades, were generally more sanguine about the quality of AISD. Younger leaders tended to express higher levels of dissatisfaction.

A Hispanic educator observed: "I don't think AISD has fulfilled its commitment to the Hispanic community. I think it's failed. . . . All you have to do is look at the teachers that are assigned in Hispanic schools. They have less experience, less education. All you have to do is look at the facilities in those areas versus the facilities they've put [elsewhere]."[13]

A common theme in the perception of quality was minority students' performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) observed by the Hispanic activist:. "We can see how the school district lags very far behind in making a priority [for] our kids to be able to pass the TAAS, pass high school, or even go to college. They are not getting college prep."[14] Other minority leaders referred to the low passing rates on the TAAS of most minority students as compared with Whites. The disparity is displayed in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**
**Passing of All TAAS Tests, 1994-95 and 1999-2000 by Ethnic Group**

1994-1995

| Race/Ethnicity | Percent Passing TAAS (%) |
|---|---|
| African American | 29 |
| Hispanic | 38 |
| White | 76 |
| Native American | 57 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 74 |

1999-2000

| Race/Ethnicity | Percent Passing TAAS (%) |
|---|---|
| African American | 55 |
| Hispanic | 61 |
| White | 88 |
| Native American | 85 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 90 |

Source: Texas Education Agency. Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports for 1999-2000 school year, Austin, Texas.

One can see that Hispanic and African American students lag behind Whites in the proportion of those passing all TAAS tests. However, the data also show substantial gains for all groups over the five-year period. Notably, Blacks and Hispanics have improved their scores much more than Whites.

Another issue mentioned with some frequency was the extent to which the curriculum accurately treated and depicted ethnic groups. A Native American educator observed:

> Information that is taught and children who come from these [different] backgrounds can frequently be very much damaged by the way teachers present things. . . . [You say] . . . "Indians are cannibals," or a particular tribe is cannibal and you [don't] even realize that you got a child that is from that background sitting in your class. That's happened many times. My own children have been told in class that "you can't be an Indian or of Indian descent, because all Indians are dead." That's a major amount of ignorance and then it ranges all the way down to little pieces of ignorance in the classroom, which have affected me and my children.[15]

A member of the Asian community expressed a similar concern:

> AISD has been real, real slow to really include Asian studies of any kind, whether its language or history, or whatever. . . . There's never been a real effort by AISD to include that into a program of curriculum. . . . I don't think there's been any real attempt to exclude them. I think they just never saw any need since there wasn't much presence. But now, with the world situation the way it is now, they're beginning to realize that maybe more programming would be useful.[16]

The issue of the quality and preparation of teachers was also voiced by several participants. They pointed out that with such low teacher salaries, it is very difficult to attract capable individuals to teaching, as expressed by another leader: "I am just amazed at how low teachers' salaries are. I am not even bothered to try and find a job even though I have the training simply because by the time I pay taxes and pay for day care for my child, I won't be making much. Teachers have one of the toughest jobs. . . . Even though there are a lot of teachers out there, they cannot hire them. You have to make the salaries competitive."[17]

Though there was praise for AISD teaching staff, several participants felt that minority schools tended to have less-experienced teachers, as one participant observed:

> I think a lot of our problem is that we have teachers that are teaching in our schools that are not certified. Now, there's nothing illegal about that but we have an unusually high number of that going on in *our* schools. Teachers who are master teachers or experienced teachers do not want to teach in certain areas; they have that choice. They should not have that choice. If you are a teacher and you are considered a master teacher or experienced teacher, you're the one that needs to come where kids are having some problems.[18]

Another Hispanic interviewee commented, "All you have to do is look at the teachers that are assigned in Hispanic schools. They have less experience, less education."[19]

> Although teaching quality of AISD staff remains a salient issue, some participants observed that hiring and assignment practices were also to blame. A religious leader stated: I'm not trying to shoot the teachers. . . . I think some of those people should not be teaching, but the real issue has to be what set that up? All of these people are just following orders. Well, who made the orders? Why do the orders say the White kids are automatically smarter than my kids? . . . Why are Black kids graduating that can't read? And why do they believe they can't read? And why do they believe they don't want to know how to read? So where did that come from? They weren't born with it.[20]

Another participant suggested that some schools and their principals discourage parent participation:

> "The school itself is at fault in many, many instances. The parents do not feel welcomed. The principal will, and counselors, in many instances make you feel like you have no business there. . . . They [parents] do not feel welcome in the schools. . . . Some of them are not very articulate, some of them are, you know, not very educated. So they go in there already with an inferiority complex, you know. And people pick up on it, and they use it against them."[21]

## Racial and Ethnic Tension between Students and among Teachers and Students

Some participants suggested there was continuing tension among groups of students. One volunteered, "As far as racial conflicts . . . I am sure they're still alive and well. . . . I kind of hear the concerns are still there."[22] Another commented that this was to be expected, given the differences between ethnic and socioeconomic groups. "If a lot of Black people hang out together in the cafeteria, a lot of Hispanic people hang out together in the cafeteria, a lot of White students say, 'Why are you always together?' But I think that everyone has a comfort zone, when it comes to that."[23]

Another community member echoed this observation: "When I go into schools now, it is not unusual now to find a Black table, a Brown table; so we've got this integration, but there's still this segregating that's taken place."[24]

An AISD official commented that there is lingering ethnic tension, but it often is beneath the surface. "Race relations within AISD are . . . not discussed very much but the issues are very much there."[25]

The same official suggested that teachers might have different expectations for different groups of students, leading to different interactions among them. "We are amazed," he commented, "to find out that children in schools that are predominately children of color; they [school staff] really don't think that those children are going to graduate. They don't think that those children are capable of learning advanced mathematics." He continued, "I work with schools west of the interstate and I also work with schools east of the interstate, and there is a difference of

expectations for some children west of the interstate; in some cases it is higher. In schools east of the interstate. . . . I was at a school just the other day and a teacher, who was White, referred to the African American children as 'those kids.' There are definitely racial issues."[26]

One participant remarked that inadvertent discrimination might be occurring. Examples included the observations that some teachers seemed to have lower expectations for minority students and that, in many schools, special education classes had large numbers of minority students. "There's more Black kids in special education in proportion to White kids. I think they do that to have some kind of way to, a subtle way they do it [discriminate]."[27]

Although most participants who commented on the issue suggested that the relationship between students and teachers has gotten better over the years, there was a sense that racial tension exists between teachers and students—especially when the students are Black or Hispanic.

Many interviewees praised AISD for having many excellent classroom teachers from all ethnic groups who make positive and substantial contributions to the lives of their students. The program director of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Walnut Creek Elementary School commended four teachers and two teaching assistants who voluntarily stayed after school to assist with the ESL program, "AISD is very cooperative with our efforts here. We have earned each other's trust. They [the teachers] have helped us build up our program."[28]

## Resource Distribution

As the data presented in Chapter 3 indicate, there is a strong perception among those we interviewed that resources are not equitable across the district. A school board member observed: "We have not been consistent in the resources we have been offering or in the expectations we have for our children."[29] In many cases, this opinion is stimulated by apparent differences in the physical facilities of the schools.

The school board member gave an example of the visible differences in facilities among schools. She recounted:

> [T]he elementary school at the time that I was PTA president of was built in 1969 on a dump—Winn Elementary. There was no art room, and the school had gotten to the point of being overcrowded, and the question was whether they should [continue]. They were using Webb as a fifth grade center . . . , fourth and fifth grade at Webb and sixth grade at Reed. . . . I was taken around different parts of the district, seeing other elementary schools that were constructed the same time as Winn. And it was like a night-and-day difference. They had art rooms. They had the kind of architectural designs that were real . . . a difference just in terms of where they were built. I mean I don't know of any other school that was built on a dump.[30]

Another individual commented: "At Reagan . . . they're not challenged like they're being challenged at Westlake. . . . Have you ever been to the school? It's a miniature college . . . the classrooms are top-notch facilities . . . their material is second to none. They have folks spending the dollar. . . . And they are not ashamed . . . they are not scared to kick people out."[31]

One Black leader argued that this resource disparity was endemic. "The problem with AISD, basically stated, you cannot get the same type of education in different parts of the city. In some parts, schools do an extremely good job, [and in others], teachers baby-sit."[32]

The resource inequality, a participant argued, reflects the socioeconomic base of the neighborhood. "Most of us who have higher incomes live where the nicer schools are. Better teachers, the best facilities in the state. We have choice, we exercise that choice, we move to Round Rock. And those folks who don't got no choice, who'd like to, are at Govalle and Garza."[33]

Another interviewee observed, "I don't think the school system has done a good job. I see schools in the East Austin area. I have visited schools where the equipment and the services and the quality of the teachers, perhaps, is not as good as it is in other parts of the community. That's unfortunate. And, I think that's an administrative and poor decision that absolutely has to change."[34]

Still another individual commented: "Now I think that everyone recognizes that there are some social inequities especially in education today. Now how much and how well a school in East Austin is taken care of as compared to a school where parents have the ability to help schools in, say, the Northwest Hills area. So I think they realize there are some inequities there and that gaps are widening because some of those issues have not been addressed, as they need to be."[35]

An AISD official observed:

> [I]f you look at the numbers, a combination of Hispanic youngsters and African American youngsters together, we would outnumber the White students who we have in our district. And, we've come to that realization. But, what we need to do then is to make sure that equity exists and that we have good teaching and good equipment in all of our schools. And you have to keep working at that sometimes because of the parents who live in a particular location. When the school district can't purchase items, the parents can do it. And they did for their neighborhood schools. Well, then you have to say that's good; these parents who live in certain parts of the city because of their circumstances, they're unable to give as much. And, so, their schools sometimes are lacking. So, what the district is trying to do is bring equity to all of our schools.[36]

One interviewee entered the caveat that expecting full equality was unrealistic: "I think that's the mistake we make . . . thinking that all of the schools are going to be equal...nothing is going to be equal in this country. We live in a capitalistic society—that's just [the] bottom line. And the rich is going to do things that, that help theirs, okay? And if you're over here poor, and not only are you poor, but you're not able to organize, they think . . . that big monster AISD . . . they can't tackle it."[37]

As these statements suggest, many community leaders feel that resource distribution in AISD is unequal. For most of them, resource equality in the context of the return to neighborhood schools is an enduring concern.

## Notes

[1]Interview by Dinah Sbelgio with Rev. Frank Garrett, KAZI, November 10, 1999.

[2] Interview by Terelene Gene with John Waukechon, AISD Native American Students' Program, Austin, Texas, October 26, 1999.

[3] Garrett interview.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Interview by Emily Trevino with Robert Mendoza, Associate Principal, Travis High School, Austin, Texas October 27, 1999.

[6] Interview by Katherine Saunders with Herman Lessard, President and CEO, Urban League, Austin, Texas, October 12, 1999.

[7] Interview by Kyla Hobbs with Velma Roberts, Vice President, Black Citizens' Task Force, Austin, Texas, November 5, 1999.

[8] Interview by Emily Trevino with Jeff Travillion, former President, NAACP, Austin, Texas, October 8, 1999.

[9] Interview by Terelene Gene with Marcus DeLeon, President, El Concilio, Austin, Texas, October 5, 1999.

[10] Interview by Dinah Sbelgio with Glen Nolly, Associate Superintendent, AISD, Austin, Texas.

[11] Interview by Melissa Lazarin with Charles Akins, Associate Superintendent, AISD, Austin, Texas, October 8, 1999.

[12] Interview by Dinah Sbelgio with Loretta Edelen, School Board Member, Area I, AISD, Austin, Texas, November 9, 1999.

[13] Interview by Melissa Lazarin with Ana Margarita Guzman, Executive Vice President, Austin Community College, Austin, Texas, November 16, 1999.

[14] DeLeon interview.

[15] Waukechon interview.

[16] Interview by Larry A. Phillips with Cecil Lawson, President, Japan-American Society of Austin, Austin, Texas, November 2, 1999.

[17] Interview by Saba Ghori with Debasree Dasgupta, Chairperson, India Community Center, Austin, Texas.

[18] Roberts interview.

[19] Guzman Interview.

[20] Interview by Amy Chang with Rev. Kristoffer Lands, Greater Calvary Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, October 14, 1999.

[21] Roberts interview.

[22] Edelen interview.

[23] Interview by Katherine Saunders with Samuel Wheeler, Project Coordinator, Upward Bound Project, Austin, Texas, December 10, 1999.

[24] Interview by Amy Chang with Rev. Joseph Parker, David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, October 25, 1999.

[25] Nolly interview.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Interview by Kyla Hobbs with Volma Overton, former President, NAACP, Austin, Texas, December 1, 1999.

[28] Interview by Saba Ghori with Dr. Chat Thiet, Program Director, ESL Program at Walnut Creek Elementary School, Austin, Texas, October 29, 1999.

[29] Edelen interview.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Lands interview.

[32] Travillion interview.

[33] Interview by Frank Fernandez with Pedro Garza, Regional Director, Texas Department of Commerce, Austin, Texas, December 16, 1999.

[34] Interview by Tanya Cruz with Dianne Galaviz, Capital Metro, Austin, Texas, October 29, 1999.

[35] Interview by Frank Fernandez with Gary Valdes, Chairman, Austin Chamber of Commerce, Austin, Texas, November 3, 1999.

[36] Akins interview.

[37] Turner interview.

# Chapter 5. Conclusions

Our study of ethnic group perceptions of AISD presents a somewhat mixed picture. Below are some of the themes we believe should be highlighted.

## A Shifting School Population

Population trends among students in AISD mirror those of other large urban areas. The number of minorities continues to grow and that of Whites to decline. The district is becoming majority-minority and has already become so at the elementary grades. Hispanic students continue to grow in number and those from African American and White backgrounds to decline. Minority groups, except for Asians, are more likely than Whites to have children in AISD and are thus dependent for education largely on AISD and on its resources. There is also evidence that children from families of lower socioeconomic backgrounds are much more likely to attend schools in AISD than those from higher economic strata. Thus, Austin ISD, like most large urban districts, increasingly serves students from lower socioeconomic strata who generally have higher levels of educational needs.

The composition of teaching staff shows similar trends. The proportion of Hispanic teachers is increasing and that of African American teachers declining. White teachers still form the large majority of the teaching staff.

## Quality of Education

Citizens' ratings of the quality of education provided by AISD give pause. Of those who had an opinion, a majority of Austinites (56 percent) rated educational quality as only poor or fair. Among the various ethnic groups studied, only the majority of Asians felt that educational quality in the district was good or excellent. African Americans, at 60 percent, were most likely to rate the quality of education as poor to fair, followed by Whites (59 percent) and Hispanics (52 percent).

Interesting is the finding that respondents with children attending AISD schools rated the quality of education more highly than those who did not have children attending AISD schools. That is, exposure to the actual workings of AISD schools appears to increase citizens' perceptions of quality.

## Ethnic Tension among Students

There is a perception that tensions exist among various ethnic groups in Austin schools. Nearly twice as many respondents held the view that tension does exist among AISD students as respondents who did not hold this view. Two-thirds of respondents who had an opinion believed that racial tension is present among students in AISD.

## Ethnic Tension between Students and Teachers

Of those in our sample who held an opinion, respondents were split evenly on whether there was ethnic tension between students and teachers. Examining how these opinions vary by the ethnicity of the respondent, we find that a large majority of Blacks saw tension between teachers and students as a problem, as did a majority of Whites. However, among Hispanics and Asians, only a minority held this view.

## Treatment of Students by AISD Teachers and Staff

As our data show, there was little support from the sample members for the notion that that their children had experienced discrimination at school. However, 15 percent of the sample did report discrimination. Though an analysis by ethnicity did not reach the required levels of significance, there is some indication that Blacks tended to report discrimination most frequently, followed by Whites, Hispanics, and Asians in that order.

## Resource Distribution

There was a strong belief among the survey sample members that minority schools in AISD do not receive the same resources as do White schools. Indeed, there was greater consensus on this topic than any other explored in our survey. More than 75 percent of those with an opinion felt that resources were unequal. The perception of inequity also varied by race: 89 percent of Blacks felt resources were unequal, followed by 77 percent of Whites, 71 percent of Hispanics, and 67 percent of Asians. Community leaders mentioned this issue more frequently than did most of the other sample members.

## Concluding Observations

Pubic opinion about AISD, as measured by our survey research and reflected in our community interviews, is mixed. The most striking negative perception is that minority schools do not receive equal resources or treatment and get the short end of the stick. Some leaders go as far as to suggest that AISD actually discriminates against minority schools. A few observe that much of the resource imbalance is the location of minority schools in lower income areas, which limits the amount of support they can draw form the surrounding neighborhood. However, the most common perception is that minority schools, which need extra resources, are not getting them.

Another negative perception concerns the general quality of education that students receive in AISD. More than half of our survey respondents who had an opinion ranked the quality of education offered in the district as only poor to fair. Even among those parents who have a child in an AISD school, nearly 50 percent offered the same ranking. As in nearly all of the issue areas we examined, there is variation among ethnic groups. Blacks and Whites gave AISD the lowest marks (60 percent and 59 percent, respectively) on quality of education, followed by Hispanics (52 percent) and Asians (41 percent). These relatively low marks give pause.

Of the various ethnic groups we studied, Blacks are the most alienated from AISD. They are also almost without exception, the most critical of the quality of education and the distribution of

school resources. At the same time, Blacks are declining as a proportion of the school population, bringing a feeling, as noted by several community leaders, that they are isolated and their voices not heard. As Hispanics have moved into neighborhoods that were previously mostly African American, they have also become more potent as a political force—often at the expense of Blacks. Our sense is that though both Blacks and Hispanics find fault with various aspects of AISD, Blacks are more beleaguered.

AISD should be concerned about these perceptions and the variations among them by Austin's ethnic groups. Finally, one should bear in mind that perception is usually reality in the sense that individuals' perceptions *are* their realities and that they act on them as true.

## Appendix. Policy Research Project Interviewees

**Charles Akins**, Associate Superintendent, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

**Susana Almanza**, Executive Director, PODER (People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources), Austin, Texas

**Vince Bland**, President, Native American Parents Group, Austin, Texas

**Dr. Rick Bradstreet**, Psychologist, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Fred Butler**, Executive Director, Community Action Network, Austin, Texas

**Dr. George Chang**, Chairperson, Asian American Employee Alliance, Austin, Texas

**Khanh Chau**, President, Vietnam Nationalist Committee, Austin, Texas

**David Chen,** President, Asian American Chamber of Commerce, Austin, Texas

**Sam Chen,** Former President, Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce, Austin, Texas

**Ashton Cumberbatch**, Cochair, Council for Community Reconciliation, Austin, Texas

**Debasree Dasgupta**, Chairperson, India Community Center, Austin, Texas

**Marcos DeLeon**, President, East Town Lake Citizens' Association, and Member, El Concilio, Austin, Texas

**Ronnie Earle,** District Attorney, Travis County, Austin, Texas

**Loretta Edelen,** Board Member, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

**Patrick Flood**, Executive Director, Austin Metropolitan Ministries, Austin, Texas

**Dianne Galaviz**, Development and Communication Manager, Capital Metro, Austin, Texas

**Arnold Garcia**, Editorial Editor, *Austin American-Statesman*, Austin, Texas

**Gus Garcia**, Member, Austin City Council, Austin, Texas

**Frank Garrett,** Reverend, KAZI 88.7 FM, Austin, Texas

**Jesus Garza,** City Manager, City of Austin, Austin, Texas

**Mario Garza,** Program Director, Culture Contacts, Austin, Texas

**Pedro Garza,** Regional Director, Texas Department of Commerce, Austin, Texas

**Margaret Gomez**, Travis County Commissioner, Precinct 45, Austin, Texas

**Charles Gorham**, Executive Director, Compliance Division of the Human Resources Department, City of Austin, Austin, Texas

**Gopal Gothikonda**, Trustee, India Community Center, Austin, Texas

**Ana Guzman**, Executive Vice President, Administration and Institutional Advancement, Austin Community College, Austin, Texas

**Brad Jackson,** Student Leader, Huston-Tillotson College, Austin, Texas

**Jennifer Kim**, President, Asian American Democrats of Texas, Austin, Texas

**Kristoffer Lands**, Reverend, Greater Cavalry Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

**Cecil Lawson,** President, Japanese Society of Austin, Austin, Texas

**Herman Lessard**, President and CEO, Urban League, Austin, Texas

**Willie Lewis**, Member, Austin City Council, Austin, Texas

**Mark Madrid,** Education Director, Austin Latino Lesbian/Gay Organization, Austin, Texas

**Mike McDonald**, Assistant Police Chief, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Robert Mendoza**, Associate Principal, Travis High School, Austin, Texas

**Mamata Mistra,** President, SAHELI, Austin, Texas

**Amy Mok**, President, Asian American Alliance, Austin, Texas

**Randy Moreno**, Former President, Hispanic Firefighters Association, Austin, Texas

**Joe Muñoz,** Citizens' Police Academy Program Coordinator, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Glen Nolly**, Area Superintendent, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

**Volma Overton**, Former President, Austin National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Austin, Texas

**Joseph Parker**, Reverend, David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, Austin Texas

**Velma Roberts**, Vice President, Black Citizens' Task Force, Austin, Texas

**Channy Soeur,** President, Cambodian Foundation, Austin, Texas

**Catherine Solomon,** Board Member, Austin Metropolitan Ministries, Austin, Texas

**William Suh,** President, Korean Association of Austin, Austin, Texas

**Dr. Michael Supancic**, Commissioner, Austin Human Rights Commission, Austin, Texas

**Dr. Chat Thiet**, Program Director, Walnut Creek Elementary ESL Program, Austin, Texas

**Lai Tram**, Asian American Liaison, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Jeffrey Travillion**, Former President, Austin National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Austin, Texas

**Dorothy Turner**, President, Black Citizens' Task Force, Austin, Texas

**Gary Valdes**, Chairman, Austin Chamber of Commerce, Austin, Texas

**John Vasquez,** Retired Captain, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Elena Vela**, Human Resources Coordinator, Common Bonds Program, Department of Human Resources, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas

**John Waukechon,** Former Director, Austin Independent School District Title IX Program, Austin, Texas

**Samuel Wheeler,** Project Coordinator, Upward Bound Project of Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas

**Louie White**, Retired Captain, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

**Patrick Worlds**, Police Officer, Austin Police Department, Austin, Texas

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